Abstract

5   The use of a network to integrate multiple unaffiliated restaurants, inventory databases associated with the restaurants, and customer records with a delivery mechanism through the use of a common network portal is disclosed. The illustrative embodiment of the present invention allows a registered customer to order from one of multiple unaffiliated restaurants over a network. Customer account information including location and billing information as well as dietary restriction information is stored at a network accessible location during a registration process. The individual

10   restaurants post menus listing the various menu items available for purchase from the restaurant. The menu items are accompanied by associated dietary information. The dietary information may be cross-referenced with any dietary restrictions specified by the customer in the stored customer record. The orders are processed using the recorded billing information from the stored customer record. An integrated database

15   programmatically updates an inventory to reflect the ingredients used in the ordered items. The preparation status of the order is available to the customer over the network. A delivery service provider is also interfaced with the network and delivers orders for more than one of the unaffiliated restaurants. The delivery service provider also has access to the preparation status and picks up the order upon completion. Thereafter, the

20   customer has access to delivery status information that is provided over the network indicating a periodically updated current location of the delivery and/or estimate of the time of arrival for the order at the customer's location.

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